

Chapter 25

COMING OF THE IRON HORSE

NEED FOR A RAILROAD

From the time the pioneers first arrived in Utah, Governor Young and his people felt keenly the need for a railroad which would connect their isolated settlements with the American frontier and also with the Pacific settlements of the west. As you knew, transportation by ox team and stagecoach was expensive, dangerous, and difficult. More than 1,000 miles lay between Salt Lake City and the terminus of the railroad, and nearly an equal distance of desert and mountain region hampered Utahns' access to the seaports of the Pacific.

Several times before the coming of the Iron Horse Governor Young and the citizens of Utah sent memorials to the Congress of the United States, explaining the need for a transcontinental railroad and asking that one be constructed. The gold rush to California in 1849, the possibility of establishing a profitable trade with China, and the myriads of home builders migrating to all the western states, increased the urgent need for a railroad. Literally thousands of American citizens were perishing while crossing the plains with ox teams—at least an average of a thousand per year, when all the western migration is considered.

Congress and the people throughout America became very interested in the proposed road to the Pacific. The United States Government made an appropriation in 1862 of over \$50,000,000 for the building of roads across the continent and let contracts to important construction companies.

UNION PACIFIC AND CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANIES

Ground was broken at Omaha in December, 1862, by the Union Pacific Railroad Company for the building of

"Utah, The Story of Her People"
by William R. Hunter

the transcontinental railroad. This company was organized at Chicago, Illinois. The Central Pacific Company was established at San Francisco and began work from that end of the line. The plan was for the roads built by the two companies to meet at Ogden, Utah. Thousands of workmen were hired, including 4,000 men from China.

Many were the difficulties encountered while constructing the iron road. Long tunnels had to be built through the mountains. Timber had to be shipped many miles from the sawmills of Minnesota and Illinois, as the country west of Missouri was almost devoid of timber. At times water was hauled as far as eighty miles for the workmen and animals. Deep snows and winter blizzards had to be contended with, not to mention the constant danger of Indian attacks. While working on the Great Plains, the company had to call on the United States soldiers to guard the road and the workmen while they laid the ties and graded the road. These are only a few of the difficulties experienced.

In six years and a half the transcontinental railroad was completed. The last spike was driven at Promontory, Utah.

DRIVING THE GOLDEN SPIKE

As the dawn of May 10, 1869, approached clear and fair, wagons and carriages loaded with men, boys, women, and girls, were leaving the farms and villages of northern Utah. An observant citizen asked, "Where are so many people going so early in the morning?"

And the reply came, "To Promontory, about fifty miles northwest of Ogden. Today the two railroads are to meet and be joined together. The little round valley of Promontory, not more than three miles across with its very level surface, is about to become one of the important spots in the industrial history of America. The ceremony of driving the golden spike is to be performed there."

"Then today really is a day for celebration not only in Utah but throughout the nation, isn't it?"

At Promontory men were at work making level the

road bed. Two rails, not yet in place, lay parallel to each other. And beside them was a small pile of new ties. Away to the east, as far as the eye could see, stretched the iron road, completed. And it also extended westward until distance faded it from the view of the spectators, many of whom had already arrived for the ceremony.

One of them observed, "When the one remaining span becomes completed, the Atlantic and the Pacific will be connected together by bands of steel rails."

While the shovels of the workmen scraped noisily, preparing the ground for the laying of the last set of rails and the accompanying ties, more wagons and carriages loaded with spectators arrived.

"Look!" the multitude shouted. "There comes the train puffing along from the east!" After it stopped, the men wearing frock coats and tall silk hats descended to the ground.

"The man in lead is Sidney Dillon, the president of the Union Pacific Company, and the second one to get out of the train is General Dodge. The others are also railroad officials," the people whispered to each other. After shaking hands with various men in the crowd, the newcomers joined with the spectators in looking inquiringly toward the west. In a short time a thin column of smoke was observed on the western horizon.

"She's coming!" they shouted. "She's coming!" And in a few moments an engine pulled in, with two passenger cars, like the first. As Governor Leland Stanford of California and party, wearing tall silk hats, descended from the cars, they were greeted with many cheers.

Soon all the ties were laid but one, and the pair of rails were put in place. Iron spikes were taken out of a heavy wooden box, driven into the ties, and fastened securely. Telegraph wires were stretched from a nearby pole and fastened to the rails in order that a message might be sent over the wires at the time of driving the golden spike. Governor Stanford on one side and General Dodge on the other made brief remarks. It was now twelve o'clock noon. The two superintendents of construction—S. B. Reed, of the Union Pacific, and S. W.

Strawbridge, of the Central—were placing under the rails the last tie.

"What a beautiful tie it is!" the people exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Governor Stanford, "it is beautiful. It's composed of California laurel, highly polished; and, as you have observed, it has a silver plate in the center bearing the following inscription: 'The last tie laid on the completion of the Pacific Railroad, May 10, 1869.' The names of the officers and directors of both companies are also inscribed on the silver plate."

"Everything is now in readiness," announced Superintendent Reed.

"Hats off!" went clicking over the telegraph wires to San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Salt Lake City, and to all other principal cities of America. Then the Reverend Doctor Todd offered prayer.

Another message was sent over the wires, stating, "We have got done praying. The spike is about to be presented."

And the response over the wire came, "We understand. All are ready in the East."

Governor Stanford was handed the big silver hammer and the gold and silver spikes, which had been supplied from the mines of Montana, Idaho, Nevada, and California. All the onlookers stood in breathless silence. An instant later the silver hammer came down. At each stroke in all the offices from San Francisco to New York, the hammer of the magnet struck the bell. The continent was now spanned by streams of bright steel bands. It has been said that "the dream of Columbus of a short route to India had at last been realized."

Throughout all the large cities of America the event was celebrated. The *Deseret News* of May 11, 1869, stated:

"At about thirty-two minutes past twelve o'clock, city time, the promised signal came, and directly the national flag was unfurled in various places. The brass and martial bands struck up lively airs, and salutes of artillery were fired from the Court House, the City Hall, and on Arsenal Hall, giving warning to the citizens in every direction that the great work was accomplished.



The principal business houses, stores, and factories were closed, and work suspended for the rest of the day."

UTAH'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE BUILDING OF THE RAILROAD

When the rails were being laid across the plains of Wyoming, Brigham Young took a contract to lay 190 miles of road from the head of Echo Canyon to Promontory. The people of Utah profited by this contract. Many sturdy Utah men and boys flocked with pick and spade, cart and ox team, to help construct the road. Timbers were cut for ties on the mountains at the head of Echo Canyon. A man with ox team received ten dollars a day, with extra for upkeep.

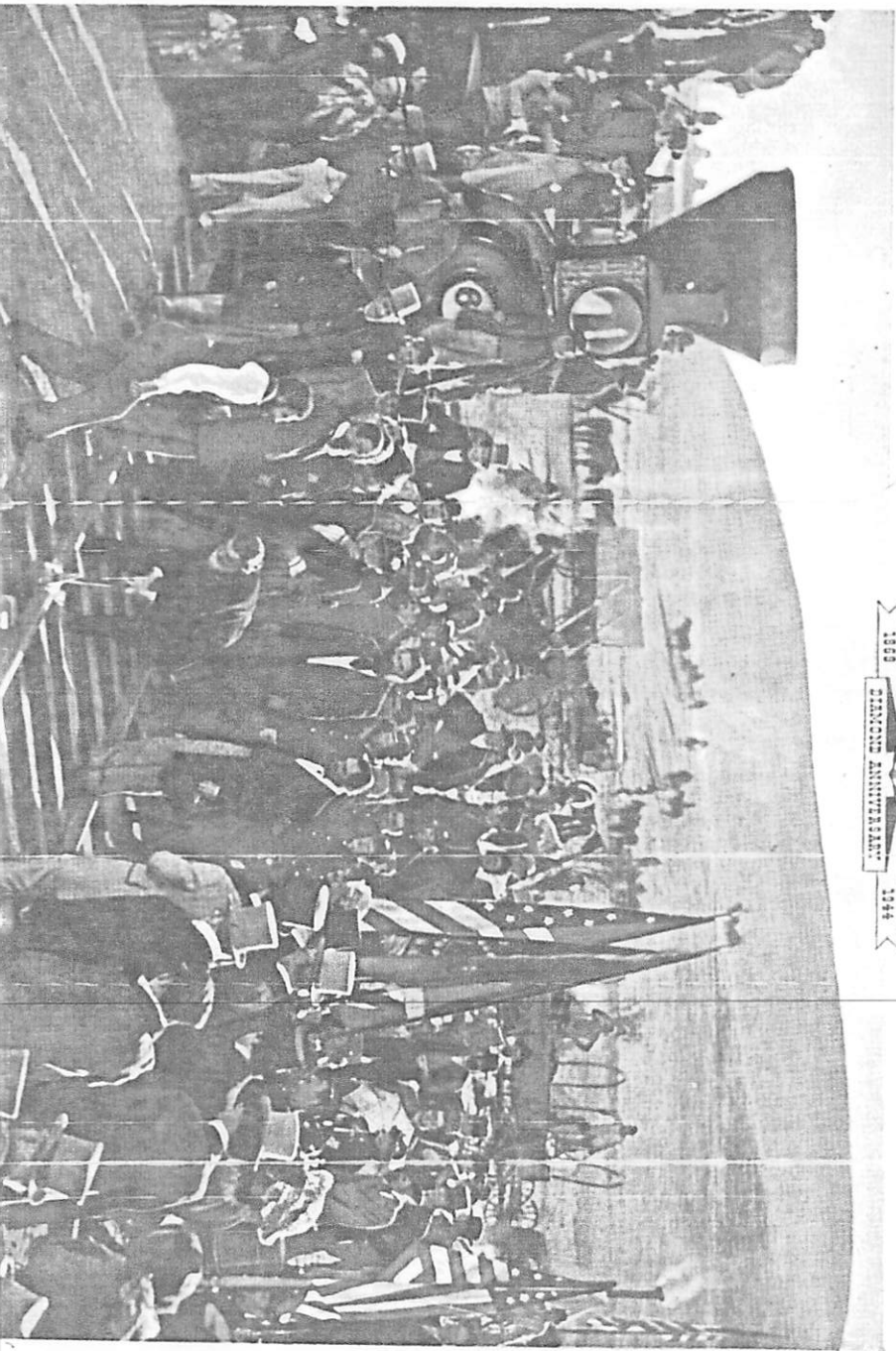
The people of Utah also sold grain, hay, and food supplies to the workmen on the railroad. The contractors paid the farmers \$100 per ton for hay, and \$7 per bushel for potatoes. This was on the Union Pacific. On the Central Pacific, they received even higher pay—\$120 a ton for hay and \$14 a hundred for oats.

UTAH CENTRAL RAILROAD

The golden-spike had scarcely been driven before a Utah company, organized by Brigham Young, broke ground at Ogden for the building of a branch line to Salt Lake City. The road was named the Utah Central Railroad. It was begun on May 17, 1869, and completed on January 10, 1870. Over 15,000 people assembled at Salt Lake to celebrate and witness the ceremonies in honor of its completion.

Brigham Young, the president of the company, had the honor of driving the last spike. He did so with a large steel mallet, made of Utah iron at the Public Works in Salt Lake City. On top of the mallet was engraved a beehive surrounded by the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord."

Early the next year the people of the Territory organized a corporation called the Utah Southern Railroad Company. Among the organizers were Daniel H. Wells,



William Jennings, Feramorz Little and others. A railroad line was built from Salt Lake City to Juab by June, 1879. Another company known as the Utah Southern Extension Railroad continued the road on from Juab to Frisco, near the Nevada line. Following the completion of this railroad, the three companies merged into one (1881), named the Utah Central Railway. Frisco remained the southern terminal for years.

In the meantime the Utah Northern Railroad Company had constructed a road from Ogden to Logan. Later the Union Pacific extended it to the rich mining region of Butte, Montana.

The building of the railroads in Utah is another good example of the pioneers' ability to cooperate, a characteristic which made them unusually successful as colonizers. In the words of Colonel A. B. Carr, of the Union Pacific Railroad:

"The Utah Central is the only line west of the Missouri River that has been built entirely without government subsidies. It has been built wholly with money wrung from soil which, a few years ago, we used to consider a desert, by the strong arms of the men and women who stand before me. Everything used in its construction, even the last spike, is the produce of the country."

About twenty years after the railroad had been completed from Salt Lake to Frisco, a corporation called the Utah and Pacific Railroad Company was created for the purpose of building a railroad from the terminal of the Utah line to Los Angeles. The road was completed in January, 1905. The above-named companies combined together and are today a part of the Union Pacific System.

¹ Cited in Young, *Founding of Utah*, 416.

